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THE ILLUSTRATED MIDRASH IN THE DURA SYNAGOGUE PAINTINGS: A NEW DIMENSION FOR THE STUDY OF JUDAISM*

By JOSEPH GUTMANN

Michael Avi-Yonah felt that Erwin Goodenough's "great achievement was to draw our attention away from the texts, on which Jewish scholarship had been exclusively founded, to the world of images and thus restore to Judaism a visual dimension it had sadly lacked before."¹

It is indeed to Goodenough's credit that, since the publication of his thirteen-volume *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Jewish art has come to assume a more respectable place in the study not only of Judaism, but of art history in general. However, one aspect of ancient Jewish art that Goodenough lamentably neglected in his studies was the role played by the aggadah in the art he discussed.

I should like to sketch three specific research problems that aggadah-inspired illustrations pose in the Dura-Europos synagogue paintings.

* I am greatly indebted to Professors Stanley F. Chyet and Harry M. Orlinsky for reading this paper and offering valuable suggestions for its improvement.

¹ M. Avi-Yonah, "Goodenough's Evaluation of Dura: A Critique," in J. Gutmann, ed., *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-evaluation* (Missoula, 1973), 133. Cf. also G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, 1973), XI: "The internal censorship of the past, particularly by rabbinical tradition, has tended to play down or to conceal many developments whose fundamentally Jewish character the contemporary historian has no reason to deny... The last two generations have had their eyes opened and have been able to perceive the spark of Jewish life and the constructive aspirations even in phenomena which Orthodox Jewish tradition has denounced with full force."

1. What were the literary channels of transmission for an aggadah that appears in the Dura paintings and is known to us from both Hellenistic-Jewish and rabbinic sources?

2. How can an illustrated aggadah in the Dura synagogue aid us not only in dating a midrashic tradition but also in reclaiming an aggadah preserved only in later Muslim and Christian writings?

3. Did there exist, in Alexandria, illustrated Septuagint or other Jewish literary scrolls, and/or did illustrated targumic or midrashic books exist which served as models for the Dura synagogue paintings?

I.

Both the third-century Dura synagogue paintings and the sixth-century Beth-Alpha synagogue mosaic offer depictions of the *Akedat Yitzhak*, but with some novel features which depart from the biblical narrative. The ram, for instance, is not “caught in the thicket by its horns” (Genesis 22:13), but is either quietly standing next to, or is tethered to, a tree, as if awaiting the divine acting out of the miracle. Rabbinic tradition clearly indicates that God foresaw the testing of Abraham and so created the ram — one of a total of ten things — at twilight on Sabbath Eve in readiness for future use.² How the ram, especially created before the primeval Sabbath, came to be standing next to, or tethered to, a tree is not explained in surviving early rabbinic literature. However, in a work by the first-century B.C.E. Greek scholar, Alexander Polyhistor, a work called *Concerning the Jews*, fragments of

² Cf. for instance, *Pirkei Avot* 5:6; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Genesis 22:13; *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* 31; and *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Wa-Yera*, par. 101. Cf. also C. Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (New York, 1979²), plate LI and E. Kitzinger, *Israeli Mosaics of the Byzantine Period* (New York, 1965), 9, fig. 8. Cf. also M. Bregman, “The Depiction of the Ram in the *Aqeda* Mosaic at Beit Alpha,” *Tarbiz*, 51 (1982), 308.

which are recorded in Eusebius' *The Preparation for the Gospel*, we read the following: "but when [Abraham was] about to slay him, he was forbidden by an angel who provided him with a ram for the offering."³ Polyhistor's contributions are not original and he excerpted many sources, both Jewish and non-Jewish; it is likely that his source for the *Akedah* came from the oldest known Hellenistic Jewish chronographer, Demetrius, who may have lived in late third-century Egypt and who dealt with this theme.⁴ The thirteenth-century European *Yalkut Shimoni*, which preserves older traditions, also records: "An angel brought [the ram] from the Garden of Eden where [the ram] was grazing under the Tree of Life and drinking from the waters which flowed beneath it..."⁵ This Jewish tradition was reflected in Western Church sources from the seventh century on; in Eastern Christian and Islamic sources from the ninth century on.⁶

Another example of divergence from the biblical text is Dura's depiction of the nude princess, rather than her handmaiden, as Exodus 2:5 has it, as the rescuer of the infant Moses from the Nile. Jewish Hellenistic writings preserved by

³ Eusebii *Praeparatio Evangelica*, ed. E.H. Gifford, I (Oxford, 1903), 531, for the Greek text (IX.19, 421b) and III, 452, for the translation. Cf. M. Schapiro, "The Angel with the Ram in Abraham's Sacrifice; A Parallel in Western and Islamic Art," in M. Schapiro, *Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art, Selected Papers*, III (New York, 1979), 295, 314, and L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, V (Philadelphia, 1947), 252, n. 245.

⁴ M. Stern, "Alexander Polyhistor," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, II (Jerusalem, 1971), 583–84, and B.Z. Wacholder, "Demetrius," *ibid.*, V, 1490–1.

⁵ *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Wa-Yera*, par. 101. Cf. the late medieval midrash, *Neweh Shalom*, 51, which claims that the angel Gabriel brought the ram. In the Islamic tradition the task of bringing the ram is usually assigned to the angel Gabriel.

⁶ For the textual sources and for depictions of the ram standing next to or tethered to a tree and the angel bringing the ram, in Christian, Jewish and Islamic art, cf. Schapiro, *op. cit.*, 291ff. and 307ff., and J. Gutmann, "The Sacrifice of Isaac: Variations on a Theme in Early Jewish and Christian Art," *Festschrift für Josef Fink* (in press).

Eusebius include fragments from the mid-second century B.C.E. tragic Jewish poet Ezekiel, who, in his biblical poem *The Exodus*, modeled after the Greek dramatist Euripides, writes: "Till Pharaoh's daughter with her maids came down to bathe her shining limbs in the cool stream. She saw the babe, and straightway took it up."⁷ The *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, at Exodus 2:5, also relates: "And the Word of the Lord sent forth upon the land of Egypt burning sores and inflammation of the flesh; and the daughter of Pharaoh, Bithiah, came down to refresh herself at the river. And her handmaidens were walking along the bank of the river, and she saw the ark among the reeds and she stretched out her arm and took it and was immediately healed of the burning and inflammation."⁸ Both aggadic examples known from Jewish Hellenistic and rabbinic sources deal with the problem of literary transmission and raise the question: Did the Dura congregation rely on older Hellenistic aggadot or did they utilize contemporary targumic-midrashic aggadot familiar to them from sermons?

⁷ Cf. M. Hurwitz, "Ezekiel the Poet," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, VI, 1102–3. *Eusebii Praeparatio Evangelica*, I, 548 for the Greek text (IX. 28, 437c) and III, 467, for the English translation. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, plate LXVII. Cf. also J. Gutmann, "The Haggadic Motif in Jewish Iconography," *Eretz-Israel*, 6 (1960), 17–18, n. 5; J. Gutmann, "Medieval Jewish Image: Controversies, Contributions, Conceptions," *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.E. Szarmach (Albany, 1979), 123 and 132, n. 8; and K. and U. Schubert, "Die Errettung des Mose aus den Wassern des Nil in der Kunst des spätantiken Judentums und das Weiterwirken dieses Motivs in der frühchristlichen und jüdisch-mittelalterlichen Kunst," in G. Braulik, ed., *Studien zum Pentateuch: Walter Kornfeld zum 60. Geburtstag* (Vienna, 1977), 59–68.

⁸ D. Rieder, ed., *Targum Jonathan ben Uziel on the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem, 1974), 83; R. LeDeaut, *Targum du Pentateuque*, I (Paris, 1979), 21–22. Cf. *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* 48; *Exodus Rabbah* 1:27; *Midrash Tanḥuma*, *Shemot* 7 and *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shemot*, par. 166. Cf. also S. Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca* (Lund, 1974), 23 for knowledge of this legend by Ephraem Syrus; and Acts 7:21. Michael L. Klein, in a letter dated September 22, 1981, graciously pointed out to me that the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* text clearly refers to leprosy (cf. מצורעת in the *Exodus Rabbah* and מנוגעת in the *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* passages cited *supra*).

Furthermore, did the rabbis know and borrow from books with Hellenistic aggadot of which Eusebius preserved only fragments, or are we dealing with separate and independent literary traditions, which simply arrived at similar interpretations of biblical texts?⁹

II.

Can the Dura synagogue paintings help us date and reclaim an aggadah found in later Islamic and Christian traditions? In the

⁹ I am more inclined to agree with the view of G. Vermes, *Post-Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden, 1975), 90, who suggests that "The targumic view was so much part of common tradition that the artist responsible for the scene depicting Moses' infancy in the synagogue of Dura-Europos substituted it for the Exodus account," than with the view of B.Z. Wacholder, *Eupolemos: A Study of Judeo-Greek Literature* (Cincinnati, 1974), 58, who writes: "The paintings on the walls of the synagogue of Dura-Europos show that the artists were inspired by the Hellenistic versions of biblical history." The emphasis on salvation, resurrection, and messianism in the program at Dura betrays a rabbinic orientation. Cf. Gutmann, *Dura-Europos Synagogue*, 137ff. In the light of the extra-Septuagintal traditions in the Hellenistic Jewish writings discussed, the question of the type of books which existed and what influence they may have exerted on later Jewish and Christian writers deserves investigation. G.T. Armstrong, in his *Die Genesis in der alten Kirche* (Tübingen, 1962), 12, states that Philo was "eigentlich ein Sammler innerhalb einer Traditionskette." Cf. also D. Flusser, "Palaea Historica — An Unknown Source of Biblical Legends," *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, 22 (1971), 67, who asks: "Is this legend about Moses [taking Pharaoh's crown from his head] a product of Jewish Hellenistic literature, or is it a 'rabbinic' legend? The first possibility seems more probable to us.... The legend itself has the flavour of a Jewish Hellenistic story; it should not be forgotten that the first witness for the story is Josephus who either knew an older form of the story or abbreviated it." Prof. Robert A. Kraft, in a letter dated 30 October, 1981, kindly wrote me: "With regard to your note concerning possible use of *catenae* by Alexandrian Greek Jews, I know of no concrete evidence. My suspicion is that a variety of scholarly tools had been developed by the Alexandrian (and other) Jewish scholars — lexica, concordances, commentaries of various sorts (perhaps including *catenae*) — but the evidence is mostly indirect and thus ambiguous." Cf. also J.T. Matthews, "Reflections of Philo Judaeus in the Septuagint Illustrations of the Joseph story," *Byzantine Studies*, 7 (1980), 41f.

Dura portrayal of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, a man appears standing inside an altar. This is Hiel, who, according to such medieval midrashic works as the *Yalkut Shimoni*, "hollowed out [the altar] and [the Baal prophets] hid him in it and said to him: 'When you hear the voice [i.e., the agreed upon signal], immediately stir the fire which is in your hand and ignite it [the altar] from underneath'; instantly God summoned a snake and it bit him [Hiel] and he died."¹⁰ A similar story about Hiel had previously been recorded by the fourth-century Church Father Ephraem Syrus,¹¹ but it was only with the discovery of the Dura synagogue that this medieval midrash could be definitely assigned to at least the third century C.E. Thus, the Dura mural helps us in dating a medieval aggadah, and demonstrates that the *Yalkut Shimoni* has preserved such ancient material as the Hiel episode and the ram brought by an angel to Abraham's sacrifice.

Let me offer an example of an aggadah which, though illustrated in a Dura synagogue panel, appears to be recorded only in Christian literary tradition. Kraeling observed that the Dura painting of David's anointing by Samuel depicts David in the presence of six brothers, rather than the seven recorded in I Samuel 16:10.¹² Some of the "aristocratic" Christian Byzantine Psalters dating from the tenth century on, also prefer depicting six.¹³ Now, both I Chronicles 2:13–15 and Josephus' *Antiquities*

¹⁰ *Yalkut Shimoni* on Kings 18:26, par. 214; *Exodus Rabbah* 15:15. Cf. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 140, plate LXI. The passage in *Midrash Devarim Rabbah* cited by Kraeling has the puzzling word Baal, instead of altar, but J. Hempel, "Vorwelt, Welt, Werden und Ausklang des Alten Testaments," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 69 (1957), 238, suggests that the passage reminds him of Baal under the throne of Yamm in Ugaritic literature. Cf. J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1955), 130f.

¹¹ L. Ginzberg, *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern und in der apokryphischen Literatur* (Amsterdam, 1900), 80–82.

¹² Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 168, plate LXVI.

¹³ Cf. J. Gutmann, "Jewish Elements in the Paris Psalter," *Marsyas*, 6

(Book VI, Chapter 8:1) mention that David had only six brothers. According to Josephus, the six brothers were present at the Anointing. The late Louis Ginzberg, with whom I discussed this matter, was puzzled why the Dura artists should have painted six brothers, as he felt it unlikely that they would have resorted to the Chronicles or to Josephus' account.¹⁴ A ninth-century Christian writer, Pseudo-Jerome, attempted to reconcile the two accounts by suggesting that one of the seven brothers of David was not really a brother but was merely treated as such; thus the traditional number was reduced to six (the prophet Nathan, son of Shimea, was simply counted as one of David's brothers). Pseudo-Jerome writes:

The question has been raised why this man [Jesse] is said to have eight sons when in Paralipomenon [I Chronicles 2:13–15] there are said to be no more than seven. This is the explanation: He [Jesse] numbered among his sons the prophet Nathan, the son of his son Shimea, whom he had reared and cared for in the place of his son. For his eight sons are said to have been led into the presence of Samuel and the eighth [David] was with the flocks. Among these sons it is clear that Nathan had been brought before Samuel, the one who is called Jonathan. In the last part of Samuel [II Samuel 21:21 and I Chronicles 20:7] it is said concerning this man Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimea, [that when Goliath, the giant of Gath taunted Israel, he] slew him. And the fact should be noted that

(1950–53), 48; G. Suckale-Redlefsen, *Bilderzyklen zum Davidleben von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 11. Jahrhunderts* (München, 1972), 41ff.; A. Cutler, "A Psalter from Mar Saba and the Evolution of the Byzantine David Cycle," *Journal of Jewish Art*, 6 (1979), 43ff.

¹⁴ Cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, VI, 264, n. 88. Jewish tradition claims there were eight sons. David was not the youngest son of Jesse, as one might infer from the Bible (I Samuel 16:11; I Chronicles 2:15), but "the least esteemed of his sons" — ולמה נקרא קטן שהיה מאוס בעיני אביו. Jesse's youngest son was Elihu (I Chronicles 26:7 and 27:18). *Ibid.*, VI, 249, n. 23. *Midrash Tannaim* 10 [which is dated by S. Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judean State*, III (Philadelphia, 1978), 441 to the Middle Ages], Radak and Rashi on I Chronicles 2:13–15 also record this tradition.

everywhere he is called a prophet. Nathan is written, not Jonathan.¹⁵

Does this ninth-century Christian tradition, then, preserve for us a midrash that is illustrated in the Dura synagogue paintings?

The Dura synagogue contains another mural which is rooted in aggadah and can best be explained by recourse to Islamic and Christian Byzantine literature. It shows Moses with his rod standing next to a well from which twelve streams of water appear to gush forth to twelve tents; in front of each tent stands an *orans* — a figure with hands raised in the attitude of prayer. The scene unfolds before the wilderness Tabernacle. The *Tosefta* tells us how “the well, which was with Israel in the wilderness, was like a rock... travelling with them up the mountains and going down with them into the valleys. Whenever Israel encamped, it encamped with them, on a high place, opposite the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.”¹⁶ This rock-well which followed the Israelites in their desert journey

¹⁵ Cf. A. Saltman, ed., *Pseudo-Jerome, Quaestiones on the Book of Samuel* (Leiden, 1975), 91:

Quaeritur cur hic octo filios habere dicatur cum in Paralipomenon non amplius quam septem legantur. Quod ita solvitur: Nathan itaque prophetam filium Simmaa filii sui quem in loco filii edocaverat et nutrierat inter filios adnumerat. Nam et coram Samuele septem ejus filii legantur adducti fuisse et octavus esse in pascuis. Inter quos Nathan adductum fuisse manifestum est, qui Ionathan vocatur. De quo in extrema parte Samuelis dicitur: *Percussit autem eum Ionathan filus Semmaa fratris David*. Et notandum quod ubicumque propheta vocatur, Nathan scribitur non Ionathan.

For the various spellings of Shimea (Shammah) cf. I Samuel 16:9, 17:3 — שִׁמְעָה; II Samuel 21:21 — שִׁמְעִי; I Chronicles 2:13 — שִׁמְעָה. Prof. Orlinsky kindly informed me that the קָרִי is שִׁמְעָה in both the II Samuel and I Chronicles accounts, *supra*.

¹⁶ *Tosefta* to *Sukkah* 3:11. Cf. J. Neusner, trans., *The Tosefta, Second Division Moed* (New York, 1981), 220. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 124, n. 436, plate LIX. Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV, 52–54, and VI, 21, n. 129. Cf. *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:2 and Ephraem Syrus who records this legend. Cf. C.-O. Nordström, “The Water Miracles of Moses in Jewish Legend and Byzantine Art,” in J. Gutmann, ed., *No Graven Images; Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible* (New

was created for the sake of Miriam and is frequently called “Miriam’s Well” in rabbinic sources.¹⁷ After it set itself up in front of the Tabernacle and when the princes of Israel sang their song to the well, it would gush forth streams that divided the camp into twelve sections and “gave them drink every one at the entrance of his tent.”¹⁸

Already Ezekiel, the second-century B.C.E. Hellenistic tragedian, is aware that “From out a simple rock twelve sparkling springs” gushed,¹⁹ and I Corinthians 10:4 has Israel drink “of that spiritual Rock which followed them”; but it is only the Koran and Byzantine sources that clearly account for Moses and his rod in our painting. Sura 7:160 reads: “We inspired Moses, when his people asked him for water, saying: Smite the rock with your staff! And there gushed forth therefrom twelve springs, so that each tribe knew their drinking place.”²⁰

York, 1971), 307; R. Stichel, “Ausserkanonische Elemente in byzantinischen Illustrationen des Alten Testaments,” *Römische Quartalschrift*, 69 (1974), 175.

¹⁷ Cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Numbers 21:17; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:2; Cf. also *Pseudo-Philo* 20:8 and other sources cited by L.H. Feldman, “Prolegomenon” to KTAV reissue of M.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York, 1971), CVI (p.135); Ginzberg, *Legends*, VI, 21, n. 126.

¹⁸ *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Numbers 21:19, and *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 19:26.

¹⁹ *Eusebii Praeparatio Evangelica*, I, 557, for the Greek text (IX. 29, 446) and III, 474, for the English translation.

²⁰ Cf. K. Jahn, *Die Geschichte der Kinder Israels des Rašīd ad-Dīn* (Vienna, 1973), 56, for knowledge of this Jewish legend by Rashīd al-Dīn, a fourteenth-century Persian historian. Cf. Stichel, *op. cit.*, 175; Nordström, *op. cit.*, 279ff. and D. Mouriki-Charalambous, “The Octateuch Miniatures of the Byzantine Manuscripts of Cosmas Indicopleustes” (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1970), 66ff. for Byzantine sources. Cf. also J. Milgrom, “Moses Sweetens the ‘Bitter Waters’ of the ‘Portable Well’, an Interpretation at the Dura-Europos Synagogue,” *Journal of Jewish Art*, 5 (1978), 45–47; Feldman, *op. cit.*, XCVI (p.109), and Ginzberg, *Legends*, VI, 14–15, n. 82. A. Zeron, “Erwägungen zu Ps. Philo’s Quellen und Zeit,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 11 (1980), 38–52 would place Ps. Philo in the third or fourth century C.E., rather than in the first century, as commonly believed.

It appears that, although many details of our mural — e.g., the portable rock-well in front of the Tabernacle and the twelve streams going to the entrance of each tent of the twelve tribes — are accounted for in the targumic-midrashic literature, it is only the Koran and Byzantine sources that link Moses and his staff with the miraculous well from which gushed forth twelve springs of water. In all likelihood the Koran and Byzantine literature have retained a Jewish tradition represented in the Dura synagogue painting.

III.

The Dura synagogue paintings remain, to be sure, an isolated phenomenon, as no other comparably elaborate synagogal program of biblical paintings has come to light. The question of the artistic sources for the Dura murals and their possible influence on later Christian art is thus still debatable. The most common theory, held by Kurt Weitzmann and his disciples, is that illustrated Jewish manuscripts served as possible guides for the Dura artists. Weitzmann and others are convinced that the Dura synagogue paintings, as well as many later Old Testament cycles on church walls and in Christian manuscripts, mirror an earlier Jewish illustrated Septuagint tradition. These illustrated Septuagint manuscripts were papyrus rolls, and they probably originated in Alexandria, Egypt.²¹

Some scholars, Avi-Yonah for one, would modify the above statement: "The Bible," he writes, "in its Hebrew form, even in the LXX translation, was too sacred to be illustrated figuratively. However, the biblical stories could be transformed into epic poems, tragedies and other forms of literary expres-

²¹ K. Weitzmann, "The Illustrated Septuagint" and "The Question of Jewish Pictorial Sources of Old Testament Illustration," in Gutmann, *No Graven Images*, 201ff. and 309ff.; C.-O. Nordström, "Das späte Judentum und die Anfänge der christlichen Kunst," *Byzantina*, 2 (1973), 3-7. Cf. my critique of Weitzmann's theory, in "The Illustrated Jewish Manuscript in Antiquity: The Present State of the Question," *No Graven Images*, 232-48.

sion. There could be no reasonable objection against the illumination of these stories in the Hellenistic manner...."²²

Josef Strzygowski, in his pathbreaking work *Orient oder Rom* (1901), already theorized that Hellenistic Jews may have had an art which served as a source of inspiration for some of the Old Testament images. It is, however, Kurt Weitzmann and his followers who attempt to reconstruct from available evidence the vast illuminated narrative cycles they are certain existed in classical Homeric and Euripidean manuscripts; they are led to the conclusion that Jews would probably have been desirous of imitating the Greek practice by illustrating their own Septuagint or related literature. This theory rests of course largely on an *argumentum ex silentio*, since no extensive illustrated classical or Christian manuscripts securely antedating the fifth century C.E. are known, while the earliest surviving illustrated Jewish manuscript comes from late ninth-century Islamic Palestine. Aside from the fact that no illustrated Jewish manuscript exists before the ninth century and that such early Jewish manuscripts as the Dead Sea Scrolls are not illustrated, it should be pointed out that the iconography of the Dura synagogue paintings reflects primarily contemporary Palestinian and not Egyptian Jewish literature; nor do these synagogue paintings reflect the Hellenistic style, which the assumed Alexandrian illustrated manuscripts would have carried. Indeed, if such illustrated manuscript models were at hand for the Dura synagogue artists, a substantial library of illustrated biblical books ranging from Genesis to Maccabees would have been required — a remote possibility, as precious illuminated manuscripts were usually not exposed to dirty ateliers.

Extra-canonical Jewish elements appearing in later Christian and Jewish art, and legends in the Dura synagogue which reappear in medieval Christian and Jewish art, have often been cited to support the theory that a now lost ancient Jewish

²² Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, 128. Cf. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 397. Cf. also B. Brenk, *Die Mosaiken von S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 79.

manuscript art — perhaps targumic-midrashic illustrated manuscripts — served as a model for the Dura artists and for later Jewish and Christian art.²³

How valid is this conclusion? One panel from the Dura synagogue, for instance, shows armed Israelites crossing the Red Sea, with the Sea split into twelve paths. The legend of the armed Israelites appears in an early eleventh-century Spanish Christian manuscript (Rome: Vatican Library, Ms. 5729, folio 82, the “Ripoll Bible”) and is featured in most fourteenth-century Spanish Haggadot.²⁴

The depiction of the armed Israelites has its origin in the interpretation of the word *hamushim* in Exodus 13:18 as “armed” — an interpretation found in many rabbinic sources.²⁵ Such Christian sources as the Vulgate, Exodus 13:18, also translate the word as armed,²⁶ and our Spanish Christian

²³ Cf. B. Narkiss, “The Sign of Jonah,” *Gesta*, 18 (1979), 71 and U. Schubert, “Die Kunst des spätantiken Judentums,” in *Judentum im Mittelalter*, ed. K. Schubert (Burgland, 1978), 23ff.

²⁴ W. Neuss, *Die katalanische Bibelillustration um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends und die spanische Buchmalerei* (Bonn, 1922), plate, 4, fig. 7 and J. Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (New York, 1978), 65. M. Metzger’s assertion in *La Haggada enluminée* (Leiden, 1973), 301: “aucune représentation chrétienne même ancienne ne montre les Hébreux armés comme on le voit à Dura et dans nos manuscrits,” is simply not borne out by the evidence.

²⁵ Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 81, n. 237, plate LII. Cf. *Targum Onkelos*, Exodus 13:18; Jerusalem Talmud, *Shabbat* VI, 4, and *Exodus Rabbah* 20:19. H.M. Orlinsky, ed., *The Torah* (Philadelphia, 1962), 122, notes that the meaning of the Hebrew word *hamushim* is uncertain.

²⁶ “Et armati ascenderunt filii Israel de terra Aegypti.” Kraeling rightly asserts that, according to Hellenistic Jewish writers, the Israelites departed defenseless, *ibid.* Both Demetrius and Ezekiel, the tragic poet, following the LXX, state: “The [Hebrew] men themselves with hands not armed for fight,” “*Eusebii Praeparatio Evangelica*, I, 555 for the Greek text (IX. 29, 444d) and III, 473 for the English translation. Cf. also, *ibid.*, “[The Israelites] came out unarmed,” I, 558 (IX. 29 446d), III, 475. Cf. Wacholder, *op. cit.*, 59, for a different interpretation. D.C. Fowler, *The Bible in English Literature* (Seattle, 1976), 109 is not aware of the above cited traditions, since he claims “that the image of the Israelites as an army at the Red Sea is itself anachronistic.” Cf.

miniature probably relied on such Christian constructions. The Spanish Hebrew miniatures bear little stylistic or iconographic relation to the Dura version of this scene, but are closely linked to contemporary Christian miniatures. Similarly, the twelve paths do appear in Christian miniatures and in such Christian writings as those of Origin, Eusebius and Theodore of Cyrensis;²⁷ so once again the Christian illustrations need not have been based on the Dura synagogue painting, its model, or Jewish literary sources. The fourteenth-century Hebrew miniatures which also feature the twelve paths during the Red Sea crossing are of course based on medieval Jewish sources, but show no artistic dependence on the Dura synagogue.²⁸

Thus, it is Christian literary works, and not aggadah or illustrated Jewish manuscripts, which probably served as direct

also J.W. Earl, "Christian Tradition in OE 'Exodus'," *Neuphilosophische Mitteilungen*, 71 (1970), 566f.

²⁷ N.R.M. DeLange, *Origin and the Jews* (Cambridge, 1976), 129f. and Nordström, "Water Miracles," 294-95. Cf. M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden, 1893), 166-67; Jahn, *op. cit.*, 54 for knowledge of this legend in Islamic literature. Cf. also the 13th-century miniature in R. Haussherr, *Bible moralisée, Faksimile-Ausgabe in Originalformat des Codex Vindobonensis 2554 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek* (Graz, 1973), I, 46 and II, 41, fol. 21v, which shows the Red Sea divided into 12 parts and the inscription reads: "en doze parties." The thirteenth-century *Bible moralisée* miniature is based on the writings of Western Church Fathers, such as Rabanus Maurus, P.L., Vol. 108, col. 66C; Peter Lombard, P.L., Vol. 191, col. 1198B; Peter Comestor, P.L., Vol. 198, col. 1158A; Rupert of Deutz, P.L., Vol. 167, col. 642B-D. These sources refer to the twelve paths (*divisiones duodecim*) during the Red Sea Crossing. Cf. D.A. Wells, *The Vorau Moses and Balaam. A Study of their Relationship to Exegetical Tradition* (Cambridge, 1970), 134-35.

²⁸ Cf. Kraeling, *op. cit.*, 85, n. 258, plate LIII. Cf. *Targum Jerushalmi*, Deuteronomy 1:1; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Exodus 14:21 and Deuteronomy 1:1; *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:1 and 11:10; *Exodus Rabbah* 24:1; *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* 42. Cf. the interesting observation by M. Metzger, "Un mahzor italien enluminé du XV^e siècle," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 20 (1976), 192ff. that the twelve curved paths at the Crossing of the Red Sea in many Hebrew manuscripts are based on Maimonides' commentary on *Pirkei Avot* 5:3.

sources of inspiration for the Christian depictions. Conversely, it is contemporary Christian art, and not the Dura synagogue, which inspired the medieval Hebrew manuscript illustrations.²⁹

If Jewish illustrated manuscripts are not behind the Dura paintings, and if it may be admitted that it was not the small Dura congregation which invented the impressive cycle, what were the immediate sources of inspiration? Some scholars are now coming to the conclusion that “pattern books, panels, cartoons, copied and copied again, served wall painters in Dura as they had in Pompeii...”³⁰

The illustrated midrash in the Dura synagogue paintings thus raises fascinating questions about the literary and artistic sources underlying these unique images. The Dura paintings are, furthermore, of great help in dating and reclaiming lost midrashim, and they open up an area of research which to date has been insufficiently investigated.

²⁹ Cf. the literature cited and the excellent summation of this problem in R. Stichel, *Die Namen Noes, seines Bruders und seiner Frau* (Göttingen, 1979), 103ff.

³⁰ M.L. Thompson, “Hypothetical Models of the Dura Paintings,” in Gutmann, *Dura-Europos Synagogue*, 47, and Gutmann, *No Graven Images*, XLIf; cf. H. Buchthal, *The ‘Musterbuch’ of Wolfenbüttel and its Position in the Art of the Thirteenth Century* (Vienna, 1979), 13ff.